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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the concept of "team player" among women in managerial positions in colleges and universities, and among their immediate supervisors. Female managers defined "team player" in fairly consistent terms. The male superiors tended to agree with the women's definitions but also extended the definitions with the addition of stronger terms such as "leader" and "decision-maker." There were also some small differences between the male superiors' and the women managers' judgments of "team player" behavior. While individual women are seen as team players by themselves and by those with whom they work, it is possible that women have difficulty putting aside their needs for affiliation and for playing a supportive role. They suffer when top management makes difficult decisions that they must implement within their work areas. They may have difficulty as members of two teams in competition with each other. A short bibliography is included. (MD)

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Can Women Bat Clean-Up, or Must They Simply Do the Cleaning? A Look At Women As Organizational Team Players

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How many times have you heard the lack of women in positions of managerial authority in corporations and human service organizations explained away with the comment, "Women aren't team players." While we can joke about the failure of women to experience the wearing of kidney pads sometime in their younger days, we trust that the basis for the comment runs a bit deeper. It in fact might be at the very core (perhaps buried deep in the unconscious) of the decision-making process by which persons are selected for leadership positions in organizations. The remark is common enough to the belief structure of society that we decided it was deserving of a close look at its actual meaning and its sources.

We are specifically interested in the concept of team play among management level employees in colleges and universities where the values for shared governance and collegial decision-making run high and where the numbers of women in administrative positions are still relatively low. Recognizing that much of the literature on women in managerial roles comes out of the business world, we sought a parallel population who could articulate its concept of team play and could evaluate themselves with respect to that concept. We conceptualized a study that would produce a definition of team play from both female administrators and their direct supervisors and would explore the behaviors that were the basis for judgments regarding the female administrators' performance as team players.

In short, this study focuses on the following questions: what is meant by the concept "team player?" do men and women share the same definitions of the concept? do administrators and their supervisors also view the concept in the same way? are women in managerial roles seen as team players? if not, what intervenes in their being perceived as such?

Field behavior as well as much that appears in both popular and scholarly literature insures the existence of certain common conceptions that belie women's role in management. Approximately 2000 years ago, Plato wrote, "All the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man." And since that time, few people have changed their minds. Whether David Riesman presented his view of the truth as Plato did, or merely his observations, he offered what seems almost a homily: "The road to the boardroom leads through the lockeroom." The Managerial Woman (Hennig and Jardim, 1978) describes the

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lessons of sports which are carried forward to the practice of management and seen as valuable skills in that arena. Those lessons include: 1. team work; 2. preparation and practice; 3. recovering after being knocked down; 4. having a sense of belonging; 5. the need for a leader; 6. the necessity to learn fast; 7. the importance of cooperation; 8. an acceptance of losing; 9. the ability to take criticism; and 10. how to manipulate the rules for one's own purposes. These field-skills-turned-board-room-skills are presented by Hennig and Jardim (and many others) as the essence of making it in management. What is clear from the start is that the models and myths of the male world are the basis for evaluation within the world of management.

While the writers just noted may represent common thinking on the subject of sports as a baseline for the development of management skills, there is much else in the literature to suggest that they may have gotten to the wrong gate by virtue of a false start. A look at Webster's New International Dictionary (1971, p.2206) reveals that the word "sport" comes from the early "disport," which means, "to carry away from work," "divert," "make mirth." Nowhere in a forty-line definition is there mention of the concept of competition. The entire definition focuses instead on the concept of play, particularly as it tends toward the notion of "playful." Thus a question of the appropriateness of the total metaphor arises; one wonders whether those persons who link management skills with team play as it grows out of athletics are in fact clear about their own analogy. The confusion may well arise out of the decline of sport--that is, pure "play"--in favor of the gowth of organized athletics, where the values and the goals are quite far from the child-like enjoyment associated with Webster's "sport."

Further questions about the accuracy of the use of team play as it grows out of sports as a metaphor for managerial behavior arise when one takes a hard look at the true nature of athletics today. It is no secret that ethics are disappearing rapidly from athletics. Nearly every day the newspapers and television broadcasts in this country carry some word of illegalities, misdemeanors, personal tragedies among the world of professional athletes. Even at the college and university level and on occasion in our high schools, we hear of suspensions, firings, probations, forfeits for wrong-doing. Even little league competition is corrupted by the need to win at all costs; the parents who coach their children and their neighbors' children teach them important lessons. Prior to World War II, we might have made a case for the playing fields being the place for training up young men of good character (Underwood, 1981). The playing fields in fact still do serve as the training fields for our much of our society--we wouldn't use the metaphor in so many other spots in our every day lives if they didn't--but the lessons have not remained the same.

Even the readers of "Sports Illustrated," one of the mainstays of our athletic society, have read the view point that sports may no longer be team oriented (Underwood, 1981). With the professionalization and proliferation of organized athletics, players, coaches, and owners have become too greedy. Survival is dependent upon individual performance and attention to the individual. We may cite Vince Lombardi with cynicism in our voices, but there is no doubt that winning is everything to most of the athletic world.

Popular literature of the 1960's and 1970's illustrates well the models that professional athletics pour into our lives through the television screens. Dave Meggysey's Out of Their League and One Brick Shy of a Load by Nathan Blount both present the professional ranks of football as they really are--brutual, immoral, illegal, drug-ridden, and destructive. Jim Bouton's Ball Four does not present professional baseball players as the models for corporate and civic decision-making; none of them appear to have either the brains or the interest in making any decisions worth discussing. Joe Namath's acrobatics--both physical and verbal--bear hardly any resemblance to what we think of as good board room skill.

Thus the analogy of the playing field and the board room begins to lose its appeal. The arguments for positive lessons learned in one place which are transferable to another appear to be overshadowed by the negative lessons which pervade the world of athletics. Actually there is reason to fear the transference of lessons from playing field to board room if in fact that process does occur. Present factors in athletics do not bode well for management of our corporations, agencies, and governments as the present generation of players becomes managers.

Nevertheless, whether we like the lessons of sports or not, we cannot deny the function of sport in our society (Stevenson and Nixon, 1972), especially as those functions, when emptied of their value-laden content, may tell us something about the use of the concept of team play in the current thinking about managerial success. There are four roles that sports or athletics play as defined by Stevenson and Nixon. First, they find sports to be an important agent of socialization, a setting in which the cultural mores and beliefs are delivered to the participants. Sports also serves the function of integrating the individual into the group, of making him/her identify with the collective; this process of course must create an out-group as well as an in-group. Third, as a source of socio-emotional stability, athletic participation provides both a release of tension and a reassurance of belongingness and ritual. Finally, Stevenson and Nixon have explored the commonly held belief that sports functions as an agent of social mobility in our society; their findings suggest that sports helps the player to move within social strata, but not from one to another.

When one considers these functions of sports, the link between the playing fields and the office becomes clearer, although it takes a slightly different turn. If one picks up some of society's guiding principles in the process of competitive play, then one is likely to act on those same principles in another situation, especially if it is viewed as reproducing some conditions--in this case most probably that of competition.

What may be viewed at first glance as reproduction of situation and behavior is the subject of much study in corporations and agencies, especially with respect to the selection of co-workers and co-members of the management team. Observations of corporate leaders, school executives, and agency heads (Kantner, 1977; Valverde, 1974) have revealed the degree to which we select clones of ourselves to work with us or succeed us. We seek conformity with prescribed patterns of behavior and appearance--reminders of the unison activities and the uniform dress on the playing fields. We behave in this way out of our need to reduce uncertainty, and to build trust; we need not only to trust our co-decision makers, but we must be able with some certainty to predict what they will decide (Kantner, 1977). Especially in situations of crisis, organizational leaders need to exert control in order to assure certainty. That control is easier and more comfortable when variations within the organization are minimal--when the organization is characterized by social homogeneity (Mott, 1972).

Popular belief also purports that our society is a generally competitve one, at least in the western world. There is in fact no contradiction between the concept of competition and that of conformity. A culture based on standardized, specialized, and predictable human components accomplishes that end through competition; we strive to do the same thing better than the others do it. Thus we are transported back to Hennig and Jardim's last lesson from sports: the ability to manipulate the rules to suit one's self. We play by the same rules, at least on the surface, but we win at all costs.

We know that until very recently the playing fields have been the territory of males. If females were present, they went unrecognized for the most part. Thus the metaphors which were carried from the team games to the management team were the property of the men. And the assumption was made, perhaps without much consideration, that the behaviors illustrated by the metaphors belonged only to the males.

Careful inquiry into the nature of male and female leader behavior, however, indicates that the differences are minimal if they exist at all. Females in positions of leadership have characteristics similar to those of males in similar positions (Foster and Kolinko, 1979; Schein, 1975). Male and female supervisors in parallel positons were described by their immediate subordinates as exhibiting similar leader behavior patterns and

were evaluated by those subordinates as equally effective (Day and Stogdill, 1972). Osborn and Vicars (1976) exploded the myth that only men are dominant, aggressive, and competitive enough to gain the necessary follower respect for effective supervision.

There were some significant differences found with respect to men and women in managerial roles. It is important to note that females in roles comparable to those held by men were likely to have less training for those roles (Ezell, Odewahn, and Sherman, 1980; Osborn and Vicars, 1976). These studies also asserted that if women were simply given the proper training, they could take a place with men in the management ranks. A number of studies revealed patterns of discrimination against women through a failure to identify traits essential to effective management and then to locate the presence of those traits in job candidates regardless of sex (Foster and Kolinko, 1979; Schein, 1975). Because of the association of behavioral traits with one sex or the other as well as with specific jobs, jobs are classified--according to sexual stereotypes--as either male or female jobs. Thus women are excluded from certain jobs because those jobs are labeled as male jobs.

Our tendency to hold specifc traits as male or female and our need to surround ourselves with people who look and act like us combine to produce some powerful discrimination against competent women, by men and women alike (Hagen and Kahn, 1975). Men in particular only like competent women from a distance. When given a choice of women with whom they prefer to work, they are likely to choose the incompetent ones. When given a choice of who not to have around, they usually choose to exclude the competent women. The reasons for this seem simple: competent women do not fit the sterotype our society holds for women--competent behavior in women is attributed to chance. Because competence in women is a disconfirmation of expectations, it is disturbing. Exclusion serves as a relief to the discomfitted and a punishment to the outlier.

On the other hand, there is serious research which indicates that males and females do demonstrate diffent interpersonal behaviors which may in fact affect their performance as managers. A comprehensive observational study of 2-5 years olds in day-care centers revealed very early sex-role stereotyping with respect to play behaviors (Pitcher and Schultz, 1983). While it is fairly clear that the children in this study were socialized into at least some of the behavioral differences they displayed, it is also clear that we do not have absolute answers to the questions of genes vs. environment. Pitcher and Schultz (and others) reported significant differences between the group-centered, imaginative, exploratory play of pre-school boys and the play of girls which focused on pairing, management of daily routines, exclusion of new-comers, and attempts at molding and constraining the behaviors of males and babies. Language appeared to be significantly different between the sexes, as would be expected

from the differences in the play activities. While t.e boys practiced at developing rules for games and invited in more participants, girls were obviously working at one-on-one affiliations and strategizing toward the ultimate goal of finding a single partner.

While Pitcher and Schultz have noted the behavior of preschool children, and the subject of this study is a population who have achieved managerial status, there is other literature to support the fact that women's work behavior is affected by their needs for affiliation and loyalty among friends within the work place (Chapman, 1975). In this particular way their behavior is different from that of men in similar positions.

The factors explored in the literature support a hunch based on observation and experience that the popular belief that women are not good team players may not be entirely true. The literature also suggests that not all persons may operate from the same definition of "team player," that the term itself may simply be thought of as a male one and therefore of necessity exclusionary of females. In addition, it may be a conscious means of excluding women from a game that is too dangerous for them according to the mythology of the game. The research which follows sought to explore those possibilities.

Methodology

Since this study focused on the concept of team player among women in managerial positions in colleges and universities, and their immediate superiors, the researchers identified the membership of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors as the population for the study. A random sample of 30 members of that organization from one large mid-western state was drawn and contacted by mail to seek their cooperation in the study and to acquire the names of their immediate superiors for their participation in the study. Twenty-one women reponded with willingness to participate, and their superiors also agreed to take part in the study.

Each of the women and their superiors participated in brief telephone interviews which were designed to elicit their definitions of the term "team player" and their judgments about the individual woman's performance as a team player accordi.g to the definition. They were also asked if they believed that the woman's colleagues saw her as a team player and what the reasons for that perception were. The initially identified female managers responded to questions seeking demographic data as well as questions about their play behavior as children.

Data were analyzed using basically two methods. Simple tallies were made of the demographic data and that concerning the play behavior. Responses to the open-ended questions concerning the definition of "team player" and the evaluation of the women's

behavior according to the definition were subjected to a content analysis, and frequency of specific terminology was noted.

Results and Discussion

The research produced a set of demographic data which describe the sample included in the study. The twenty-one female managers interviewed in this study held a range of positions within the administrative structure of colleges and universities. Thirteen of them were in top positions in the area or division they served; they were directors, deans, or coordinators for the most part. Eight of them served as associates or assistants in the same fields, ranging from the positions of vice-president and associate provost on down the hierarchy. They were from 30 to 54 years in age, with 12 of them being less than 40 years old. Their last degrees earned included 10 Masters of Arts, one Master of Education, one Master of Science, one Master of Business Administration, and seven Doctors of Philosophy. Approximately one-half of them (10) were either only children or eldest children. Again about one-half of them (11) were married at the present time; eight of them had never married. Less than half of them (9) have children. These factors suggest that as a sample of the total female population in our society, we are considering a very unusual group. This may have some bearing on the generalizability of the data beyond the realm of women who hold managerial positions. There is no readily identifiable research to confirm this data in terms of its representativeness of women in managerial positions or more specifically of women involved in the management of colleges and universities.

The female managers defined team player using some fairly consistent terminology. The most commonly mentioned concept was that of "cooperation toward the achievement of group goals and the university mission;" these people clearly saw themselves as members in group action. This language appeared in the responses of 13 (65%) of the women. Seven respondents said that they believed team players were supportive of others, and six commented that a team player is one who works well with others. Approximately twenty percent stated that team players viewed all participants as being of equal importance, and that leadership roles were shared equally. Fifteen per cent included the idea that a team player seeks others' opinions and works for group concensus. While more than one of these responses might have appeared in the same individual's comments, it was clear that all of the women felt the support of group action and the achievement of group satisfaction were the primary descriptors of the term. A variety of other factors emerged from the total pool of responses, but none of them were mentioned by more than one or two persons and therefore are not significant.

Each of the female managers reported that she considered

herself a team player, and all of them perceived that their colleagues saw them as team players as well. The reasons they gave were consistent with their definitions of "team player." The most frequent response indicated that they were cooperative and supportive of others. They saw themselves as working to promote unity, helping others, consulting with others, and keeping the organizational goals in sight. Several mentioned behaviors which suggested that they were not necessarily in a power position among their colleagues; phrases such as "do what needs to be done," "play by the rules," "sit back," "be flexible," and "respect others," were each noted by two persons, for a total of eight.

The supervisors tended to agree with the initial definition of a team player as put forth by the women they supervised. Specifically they most often (75%) used the terms "group or individual action toward the achievement of group goals." They differed slightly from their subordinates' perceptions through their insertion of the word "individual," which was not to be found among the women's terminology. Also like the women, they perceived that behaviors indicative of "working well with others," being "helpful," (33%) and "carrying one's share of the work," and being "equal to others," (20%) are components of the definition. But at this point the immediate superiors went beyond the definitions offered by their subordinates and added another component to the meaning of "team player." More than half (11) of the supervisors said that a team player had to be "flexible," or "adaptive," or "accepting of others' point of view." An even greater departure from the central theme came through another statement made by approximately half (11) of the supervisors. They used the words "leader," "motivator," "confident," "assertive," "innovator," or "decision-maker," in their formulations of the definition of team player. The addition of these stronger words which set the "team player" apart from the group, at least in some phases of behavior, was not related to the sex of the respondent.

The superviors' judgment of their subordinates as team players hardly differed from that of the women; 20 of 21 supervisors described their subordinates as team players. In the single case where perceptions differed, the immediate superior's perception was based on lack of experience on the part of the subordinate in formulating a concept of the total organization and its direction. In evaluating the subordinates' colleagues' judgments of team player behavior on the part of the subordinate, the supervisors were less consistent. Several answers from the supervisors were qualified by information which suggested that people at different levels or in different sections of the organization viewed the subordinate differently, depending upon her role with that particular part of the organization. A few mentioned the fact that because the subordinate was the head of her division and therefore the boss, traits of a boss were attrib-

uted to her when they were not present and her warm and supportive characteristics (typical of the "team player" vision) were covered up by the inaccurate attributions.

The questions about the play behavior of the female managers as children revealed little in the way of consistent patterns except that most recalled most of their play time spent with groups of children rather than with individuals or alone. Approximately two thirds of them were active in organized athletic activities as youngsters (13), and two-thirds of them (14) profess to be active athletes today. The level of participation in sports is higher than that of the typical female, and the preponderance of play being in groups is not consistent with the findings of Pitcher and Schultz (1983). Again, these small points set this group apart from the norm.

Conclusions

The most interesting finding in the study lies in the differences between the definitions of "team player" as put forth by the female managers and their immediate superiors, and following that by the very small difference in their judgments of "team player" behavior on the part of the women under consideration. Although the definitions were different, the women seemed to meet both sets of criteria.

Since the interviews were carried out without any information being provided to the respondent that might prejudice or bias the responses, there is little within the responses that serves as an interpretation of the reasons behind the findings. There is one possible interpretation, however, of the differences in definitions that is related to the roles and positions of the two sets of respondents. In most cases, the immediate supervisor was external to the division in which the female manager worked; therefore the internalized view of "team" itself--that is, its location in the organization and its membership, may well have differed between the two groups. While the female manager thought of herself as a player on a team consisting of herself and the others in her division, her supervisor may well have thought of her as a participant on the institutional management team of which s/he is a part. What this means is that in fact the women we interviewed are members of two teams; one is composed of the division players, and the other is composed of the top persons from each division. And the next step in the analysis brings one to the point of conflict: what the top management team decides may not be what the division team had hoped for, and then the female manager in our scenario becomes the bearer of bad news for her division team.

This insight may in fact bring us to the crux of the comment we set out to unravel. There is evidence in the literature that women have greater affiliation needs than men and that they structure their work behavior in many cases to meet those needs. Being

in a position of playing on two teams--dancing between them in most cases--may be in conflict with some very strong personal needs for the female manager. Hence her tolerance for both of those roles may be low, and there may occur instances in which she does not carry out the hard decisions which impinge on her relationships with her colleagues in her own division. Nor does she speak very assertively for her own division when she is playing with the top management team. Thus she is perceived by those above her as not being a team player on the one hand, and perhaps more important, not even being able to put herself into the game at hand, whatever it might be.

Since it is generally from above that promotion and/or hiring decisons are made, the belief that women are not good team players is in fact a serious deterrent to the career advancement of women into increasingly responsible positions in management.

This study has drawn as much on the literature as it has on the data gleaned from the subjects involved in the research. What seems evident from both the literature on leadership behavior and from our conversations with women in administrative positions and with their immediate superiors is that in fact individual women are seen as team players by themselves and by those with whom they work; their behavior is hardly different from the behavior of males in similar positions. It is possible that women have difficulty putting aside their need for affiliation and their need to play a supportive role. They suffer when hard decisions are made above and must be implemented within their work arenas. They have equal difficulty serving as spokespersons (leaders) of their own divisions in the presence of upper management. Thus they have difficulty as members of two teams which are often in competition with each other, at least from some perspectives.

What we may see here is in fact women's difficulty with playing per se. A glance back at recordings of the specific play events of boys and girls indicates that the boys are fanciful and inventive, while the girls, at the ages of 4 and 5, are working on the burdens of their adult lives as they "play" house or school. This lack of experience for girls in leaving reality as children may be the cause of every detail in the office seeming like the ultimate event in life. Women have missed out on those playfield lessons in viewing the event as a game, getting up when one is knocked down, and continuing to play.

Thus in condemning women as poor team players, what we are interpreting is not so much specific behaviors as it is a general sense of ease with the job. The decisions to be made, the tasks to be managed, and the people to be led are not merely a game for women. Because men have a stronger sense of "game" and "play" and also hold most of the organizational power, women pay a price for being different.

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